



California Regional Water Quality Control Board

Central Coast Region



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Agency Secretary

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Arnold Schwarzenegger
Governor

December 20, 2006

Dear Interested Parties:

RE: Coliform Bacteria Discharges From Grazing and Livestock Operations:
Implementing Best Management Practices

Recent outbreaks of coliform bacteria contamination in food crops caused the death of three people and serious injury to at least two hundred others, and research indicates that livestock and grazing operations are potential sources of this contamination. Accordingly, Water Board staff is evaluating the need for a regulatory program to reduce the discharge of coliform bacteria from livestock and grazing operations on the Central Coast. This letter is to inform you that we are evaluating the need for a regulatory program relative to grazing and livestock operations, and in the meantime, to encourage the use of best management practices that will minimize the discharge of coliform bacteria from these operations.

Pursuant to the State's *Policy for the Implementation and Enforcement of the Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Program*, the Central Coast Water Board must regulate all nonpoint sources of pollution, using the permitting authorities provided by the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act. The permitting authorities include but are not limited to:

- Basin Plan prohibitions
- Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs)
- Waivers of WDRs (subject to compliance with specific conditions)

In September 2005, the Central Coast Water Board concurred with a staff recommendation to continue to evaluate regulations and requirements for grazing and livestock operations as nonpoint source dischargers on a watershed-by-watershed basis. Staff asserted that the results of Total Maximum Daily Load investigations would determine the level of impact and need for such regulations or requirements. We are reevaluating that strategy.

Our current goal is to determine the degree to which grazing and livestock operations may be contributing to elevated levels of coliform bacteria in rivers and streams, or contributing to any water quality impacts that may have contributed to the recent coliform bacteria outbreak (specifically, the 0157: H7 bacteria strain). Staff is evaluating if and how existing and current data support establishment of a regional regulatory program, and the pros and cons of establishing a Basin Plan prohibition, waste discharge requirements, or a waiver of waste discharge requirements. We will keep you informed as we move forward with this evaluation.

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In the meantime, the Central Coast Water Board encourages owners and operators of grazing and livestock operations to use management practices that protect water quality. You may access information on grazing management and specific water quality management practices at


<http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/nps/docs/encyclopedia/agriculture.pdf>. From this link you can also access the California Board of Forestry's California Rangeland Water Quality Management Plan, information on the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) standards for rangeland health and guidelines for livestock grazing on public lands, and information on the California Grazing Academy. You will also find general information about Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Programs at <http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/nps/index.html#programs>.

We recognize the accomplishments of grazing and livestock operators who follow the California Rangeland Water Quality Management Plan. We also value and appreciate their participation in the Ranch Water Quality Short Courses supported by the California Cattleman's Association, California Association of Resource Conservation Districts, California Woolgrowers Association, California Farm Bureau Federation, the State Water Resources Control Board, the Regional Water Boards, Santa Clara Valley and other Water Districts, UC Cooperative Extension and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. We have seen water quality improvements and protections from numerous grant-funded projects that have restored damaged land or riparian systems, controlled discharges to water quality, and demonstrated other effective management practices associated with grazing and livestock operations.

If you would like to receive additional information from the Water Board about these issues, please send your contact information to Kelley Blackshear at kblackshear@waterboards.ca.gov or call her at 805-549-3865.

If you have any questions about development of a regulatory program for grazing or livestock operations in the Central Coast Region, please contact Lisa Horowitz McCann at lmccann@waterboards.ca.gov or 805-549-3132.

Sincerely,

for 
Roger Briggs
Executive Officer

Cc: Grazing and Livestock Interested Parties List

File: Nonpoint Source Program Management

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